

CHARTER TOWNSHIP OF MERIDIAN
REGULAR MEETING ENVIRONMENTAL COMMISSION -**DRAFT**-
5151 Marsh Road, Okemos MI 48864-1198
517.853.4000, Township Hall Room
WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 1st, 2025, 7:00PM

PRESENT: Vice Chair Yu Man Lee
Commissioners Tom Frazier, John Sarver, Richard Miksicek, Laura Belisle,
Cynthia Peterson, Harrison Batten and Trustee Nickolas Lentz

ABSENT: Chair Bill McConnell

STAFF: Project Engineer Jack Hughes

1. CALL MEETING TO ORDER

Vice Chair Lee called the October 1st, 2025, Township Environmental Commission meeting to order at 7:00 pm.

2. ROLL CALL

Project Engineer Hughes called the roll of the Commission.

3. PRESENTATION

- A. Green Grant Program - Montessori Radmoor School
- B. Bird City Michigan - Capital Area Audubon Society Board

See slides and video on Township website and HOMTV for details.

4. CITIZENS ADDRESS AGENDA ITEMS AND NON-AGENDA ITEMS

A public comment was taken at this time. While the item for this is technically #11, it was deemed this was a more appropriate time for them to speak. Future Agendas will be updated to reflect this.

Beth Bechtel, a resident of Haslett, Michigan, respectfully requested the Meridian Township Environmental Commissioners to develop comprehensive health and safety policies for solar panels and battery energy storage to prevent toxic industrial waste and safeguard residents' health. She highlighted that these technologies contain heavy metals like lead, cadmium, and lithium, which pose a risk of contaminating the soil, land, and waterways, a concern that mirrors existing federal EPA and local Saint Clair County regulations. Citing a statement from the Potato Growers of Michigan that advocates for prioritizing rooftop solar to protect soil, she urged the township to take a leadership role and establish clear policies addressing solar placement off of pristine land, proper decommissioning including removal of all infrastructure, prevention of audio and visual pollution, and responsible end-of-life recycling.

5. COMMUNICATIONS

None at this time.

6. APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Commissioner Fraizer moved to approve the Agenda of the October 1st, 2025 Environmental Commission Regular meeting. Seconded by Commissioner Miksicek. Motion passed unanimously.

7. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Commissioner Lee moved to approve the Minutes of the August 6th, 2025 Environmental Commission Regular Meeting. Motion passed unanimously.

8. NEW BUSINESS

None at this time.

9. UNFINISHED BUSINESS

None at this time.

10. REPORTS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

A. Staff

This discussion focused on two main topics: the success of a recent community recycling event and the evaluation of a major renewable energy program offered by Consumers Energy.

Project Engineer Hughes kicked off the discussion by sharing the impressive results of the September 20th recycling event, which was organized by the Green Team. The event was a significant success despite a new location and setup, drawing over 600 participants from both the local area and surrounding counties. With the help of over 60 volunteers, the event collected a massive 21,000 pounds of assorted electronics. The total cost of recycling was about \$6,000, which was more than halfway offset by \$3,300 in community donations, a better financial result than previous events.

A key point raised by Trustee Lentz was whether doing the recycling in bulk results in a better rate. Project Engineer Hughes confirmed that it does, allowing them to offer a discount on typically hard-to-recycle items like TVs and monitors—accepting a \$20 donation instead of the \$30 charged by places like Best Buy. Commissioner Sarver, who participated as a customer, praised the Green Team and staff (like Commissioners Fraizer and Batten) for the event's smooth organization and execution.

The second major topic was the Township's consideration of joining Consumers Energy's Renewable Energy Program, an option that could quickly help them meet their goal of 100% renewable energy by 2035. This program involves the Township paying an additional fee on its electricity bill to help subsidize the construction of new solar energy production fields, effectively purchasing only green-produced electricity. The total buy-in was projected to be about \$1.3 million over 20 years.

The Township ultimately elected not to join the program by the September 30th deadline, but the door remains open for future entry. This decision was driven by the program's financial volatility. Project Engineer Hughes explained that initial projections showed the Township 'paying into the program' for seven years and then benefiting from energy savings credits for 13 years; however, those projections dramatically changed, later showing them 'paying in' for 15 years and only benefiting for the last five. Given the unpredictability of these projections, the Board felt they needed more time to study the long-term financial implications. Trustee Lentz directed interested residents to the September 2nd Board meeting video for more details on the presentation and the Board's questions.

The discussion then pivoted to a wider debate about the best strategy for the Township. Commission members weighed the ease of joining the Consumers Energy program (which minimizes staff work and management) against the better financial returns and local impact of building and operating their own solar infrastructure, particularly on major building rooftops. Commissioner Fraizer suggested a combination of both may be necessary to fully reach the 100% goal, as local projects might cover major buildings but struggle to meet the decentralized power demands of streetlights and lift stations. The consensus was that any future decision must be well-researched, financially sound, and involve clear communication to the public beforehand.

B. Liaisons

Trustee Lentz provided an update from the Township Board.

The Township Board passed a new rooster regulation on August 19th, restricting roosters in the urban core of Meridian Township due to specific complaints. They also received the same presentation from Food Rescue Lansing that the Commission had previously seen. At the September 2nd meeting, the Board discussed the Consumers Energy renewable program and updated parking lot landscaping standards. These changes are a win for the environment, as they reduce the required size of parking lots and make it easier to incorporate native plants and rain gardens, helping to mitigate runoff problems. The most recent meeting on the 16th focused on the Township Budget, which is slated for a vote the following Tuesday. The budget saw a slight reduction with cuts to unneeded outside services and the elimination of positions related to expiring federal funds or retirements.

A particularly beneficial budget proposal involves adopting a new system for utility billing that would allow the Township to detect water leaks within 24 hours of them starting, such as from a leaky pipe or running toilet. This is a significant improvement over the current mobile transponder system, which often only detects leaks weeks after they begin. Additionally, the annual Deer Culling Program began and will run through January 1st. This program has been effective, reducing car-deer collisions by about 50%, and the resulting meat is donated to local food banks. Finally, a recent listening session was held at a local church, and staff noted that the East Lansing Meridian Water Sewer Authority is welcoming environmental groups to tour their facility, which is a model for water treatment, having successfully been reclassified to the more sustainable "groundwater" status.

Vice Chair Lee noted their concern about the annual process of requesting funds for the Green Grants and the Climate Sustainability Fund, especially since the new budget proposed a \$5,000 reduction in the Green Grants program, though it will remain in place. They inquired about leftover money in the Climate Sustainability Fund. Staff confirmed there is a carryover of

remaining funds from the previous year. This funding is already being considered to address routine flooding in the Columbia Street area, with plans to use the money for topographical surveys and watershed analysis by engineering consultants. The Vice Chair asked staff to confirm the exact amount of carryover funding available for potential projects in the coming year.

Chair McConnell was not present to provide an update from the Planning Commission.

Vice Chair Lee provided an update from the Land Preservation Advisory Board.

The Land Preservation Advisory Board (LPAB) met twice and discussed several key items, the most prominent being a proposed prescribed burn at Lake Park, which is adjacent to the Red Cedar Glen Preserve. Since previous burns have only taken place at the Preserve, the LPAB is proposing to include the park land in the burn to enhance native vegetation, with an estimated total cost between \$5,000 and \$9,000. A major point of discussion is how to fund the burn, as the Land Preservation millage only covers preserves, not parks. Potential solutions include a cost-share arrangement with the Parks Commission or utilizing Green Grants funding. Additionally, the LPAB is working on a permanent name for the newly acquired Cornell Sweetwood Preserve and is considering a community member's request to designate a Township-owned property by the central fire station as a new land preserve. Finally, an update on wetland education efforts was provided, noting that staff secured a bid for additional wetland signs using remaining 2024 funds, and staff may present a full update on these efforts to the Commission soon.

Commissioner Sarver did not have an update from the Brownfield Redevelopment Authority.

Commissioner Miksicek provided an update from the Parks Commission.

The Park Commission held two recent meetings, introducing two new staff members: Ben Roscoe, who is coordinating the cooperative Red Cedar Water Trails Project to enhance the river between Williamston and MSU, and Alex Z., a new Recreational Specialist. Substantial park improvements were reported, including the installation of new playground equipment at Towner Road and Ottawa Hills Parks, with more planned for Marshall Ballpark, and the restoration of the baseball field at Towner Road Park. Planning for new kayak launches at the Harris Nature Center and Orange Park is underway for 2025, with construction slated for 2026. The Commission also reviewed the Deer Management Program and decided to increase the harvest quota from 300 to 350 animals, a number approved by the DNR. The Parks Commission received an informative presentation on park operations and staffing from Superintendent Kati Adams and requested an update on the proposed bioswale project in Marshall Park, specifically asking for the calendar for surveys and subsequent improvements.

C. Teams

Commissioner Sarver provided an update from the Energy Team.

The Energy Team reported positive momentum in the Solarize program with Absolute Solar, which secured seven signed contracts allowing participants to receive a 7% discount in addition to the 30% federal tax credit, provided installations are completed by the end of the calendar year when the residential credit expires. Looking ahead, the focus for the Solarize program will likely shift to commercial and nonprofit entities next year, as the federal tax credit will remain available for them.

Commissioner Fraizer provided an update from the Green Team.

Regarding the recent electronics recycling event, the team highlighted that Consumers Energy was involved, collecting and recycling numerous small appliances and offering customers new

energy-efficient dehumidifiers. They also collected several bags of winter coats and boots for donation to those in need. Finally, the team recognized Project Engineer Hughes for stepping in to help organize the successful event and confirmed that this concludes their major events for the calendar year, with a full schedule expected again next year.

No news from the Food Composting Team.

Commissioner Fraizer provided an update from the Green Burial Committee.

The Green Burial Team is scheduled to present their plans to the Township Board next week, on Tuesday, October 7th. This presentation was delayed as the team tried to find a time when all members could attend, and the goal is to receive input and direction from the Board on the future of the green burial initiative.

D. Haslett/Okemos High School

Commissioner Batten provided an update from the Haslett/Okemos High Schools.

The report highlighted strong engagement in environmental and sustainability efforts across the Haslett school district as the new school year begins. The Earth Club at the elementary level has started planning, receiving almost 50 applications for one school alone, which demonstrates huge and rapid interest from young students. Additionally, the high school's Sustainability Club is running a successful flower fundraiser for homecoming to raise money for their initiatives.

A significant activity for Commissioner Batten involved attending a Climate Summit run by MiCAN and EGLE, followed by a Capital Day lobbying event at the State Capitol. Batten was able to speak with state representatives and senators about prioritizing sustainability and environmental protection. They also gave a speech on the Capitol steps, sharing their personal story and the importance of climate education with attending lobbyists.

On a district level, the Haslett Sustainability Team has expanded its efforts. This team, which includes teachers from all buildings, the Superintendent, and the Associate Superintendent, has a full year of meetings scheduled, with each meeting taking place at a different school building to see what is happening firsthand. A major goal is for the entire district to achieve Green District status under the state's Green Schools Program. Criteria for this status range from basic activities like paper recycling and repurposing old materials (like T-shirts into whiteboard erasers) to larger initiatives, such as using compostable cafeteria trays, composting food waste, or purchasing electric school buses. The momentum for these district-wide efforts remains high, and at least three of the schools already hold Green School status at various levels.

E. Other

No reports.

11. COMMENTS FROM THE PUBLIC

Occurred during Agenda Item #4. Will plan to move this item up for future meetings.

12. OTHER MATTERS AND COMMISSIONER COMMENTS

13. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at 8:44pm.